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E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/26/2016

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SUBJECT: ASSISTANT SECRETARY WELCH'S APRIL 18, 2006,  
CONVERSATION WITH TUNISIAN DEFENSE MINISTER KAMEL MORJANE

Classified By: NEA A/S David Welch for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: In an April 18, 2006 meeting with A/S Welch on the margins of the 21st Tunisian-American Joint Military Commission, Tunisian Defense Minister Morjane reinforced many of the points made in the just prior meeting with Deputy Secretary Zoellick with regards to Tunisia's intention to present a draft SOFA in Tunis within days, Tunisian willingness to increase regional peacekeeping in sub-Saharan Africa and to offer coordinated assistance to the poorest Sahel countries, and Tunisian concern about what it perceives to be a continuing Islamist threat, which Tunisia gives as the primary pretext for the slow pace of political reform. Morjane also agreed to pass a request to President Ben Ali to improve CT cooperation. Welch also asked that the Tunisians do more with MEPI. End Summary.

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Security and CT Cooperation  
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¶2. (C) Morjane began the meeting by emphasizing the importance of what he called the U.S.-Tunisian strategic alliance to Tunisia. Welch countered that he thought mil-mil cooperation was excellent, but that in the area of overall defense cooperation, and in particular CT, there was room for improvement. Morjane expressed surprise and agreed to pass the request to his government. Welch said that one of the problems was that these conversations often happen in restricted channels, and assessments of the challenges and requests for improvement often do not make it back into the main policy discussions. Morjane proposed that part of the solution might be one GOT POC for these issues; he thought these conversations might be diffused across several ministries in Tunis and not addressed comprehensively. Both agreed that EUCOM's efforts in Tunisia and the Africa region were very energetic and productive and hoped they would increase.

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Political Reform and Human Rights  
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¶3. (C) Both sides agreed that more could be done in the area of reform cooperation and that it should begin with better senior level dialogue. Morjane added later, however, that this improved dialogue must happen at all levels and that many more U.S. delegations should travel to Tunisia to assess these matters on the ground. Morjane underscored Tunisia's largely socioeconomic approach to addressing terrorism and said that Tunisia has no flexibility when it comes to any Islamist threat (from any quarter and of any variety). He expressed the desire for more open dialogue on reform with the U.S. Welch expressed interest in hearing more details about the Tunisian plan for reform and said that given that the MEPI regional office is in Tunisia and the Tunisians do little with the U.S. in the way of reform, he would like to explore ways to do more MEPI reform-oriented programs.

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¶4. (C) Morjane said that the GOT would be presenting in the coming days and weeks not only new proposed SOFA language but also a new Memorandum of Understanding on the use of GOT soil and airspace for maneuver-related bombing in the Ben Ghellouf range and mid-flight refueling practice for planes based offshore on U.S. ships. He said that the only remaining issue on SOFA was Tunisian participation in investigations, but expressed the wish that a team of U.S. lawyers visit Tunisia to finalize the document, once presented to Embassy Tunis.

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